

SENATE—Monday, November 1, 1999

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Dear Lord, who always has a next step in the adventure of living and leadership, we thank You for calling us to greater intentionality. Help us to put into action what we intend. Clarify Your goals for us as individuals and as a nation and then call us out from where we are to a new level of risk. What would we do if we trusted You completely? Give us the courage to do it! May this be a "do-it-now" action week. We have nothing to fear when we have no one else to please but You. Bless the Senators with intentionality that is willing to risk anything except their relationship with You. You are our Lord and Savior. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CHUCK HAGEL, a Senator from the State of Nebraska, led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska is recognized.
Mr. HAGEL. I thank the Chair.

SCHEDULE

Mr. HAGEL. On behalf of the leader, today the Senate will begin 2 hours of morning business and then resume consideration of the conference report to accompany the D.C./Labor-HHS appropriations bill. As announced on Friday, there will be no votes today. By a previous consent agreement, the vote on the conference report to accompany the D.C./Labor appropriations bill will occur at 10 o'clock Tuesday morning. Tomorrow morning there will be an additional 30 minutes of debate on the conference report prior to the 10 a.m. vote. Senators who have statements on that conference report should be prepared to come to the floor during today's session. As a reminder, two cloture motions were filed on Friday in relation to the African trade bill. Those votes will occur tomorrow as outlined by rule XXII or at a time to be determined by the two leaders.

I thank my colleagues for their attention.

MEASURE PLACED ON CALENDAR

Mr. HAGEL. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk due for its second reading.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1832) to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to increase the Federal minimum wage.

Mr. HAGEL. Mr. President, I object to further proceedings on this bill at this time.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the rule, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. HAGEL. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, I note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WYDEN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAGEL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MEDICARE COVERAGE FOR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, this is the ninth time I have come to the floor of the Senate to talk about the issue of Medicare coverage for prescription drugs. As the Senate can see, I am urging seniors to send in copies of their prescription drug bills, as this poster instructs, to your Senator, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510.

I am doing this because it is critically important that Congress move on this issue and address it in a bipartisan way. With the counsel and input of Senator SNOWE of Maine, there is one bipartisan bill now before the Senate to cover the issue of prescription drugs for the Nation's elderly.

I am sure other Members of the Senate are getting the kind of mail I am. What I will do this morning, as I have done on eight previous occasions, is talk specifically about some of the bills I am getting from senior citizens in Oregon in an effort to pull together a bipartisan coalition for action in this session.

We have heard, again and again, experts on the health care issue say the prescription drug question is too complicated for the Senate to act on at this time. That is a view I do not share. It is not shared by Senator SNOWE. In fact, 54 Members of the Senate have already voted for the funding plan the two of us have developed. We have al-

ready laid the foundation for the Senate to move on this issue in a bipartisan way.

I will talk for a few minutes this afternoon about our legislation and about some copies of bills I have received from senior citizens. I have a whole sheaf of them to go through.

What our bill is all about is trying to give senior citizens who are on Medicare the same kind of bargaining power in the marketplace that a health maintenance organization has. The sad part about this issue is that the senior citizens get shellacked on their prescription bills twice. Medicare doesn't cover prescription drugs. When the program began in 1965, it didn't cover prescriptions. Maybe back then there was a feeling they weren't that important. If anybody thought that then, they certainly would not believe that now, because we have more than 20 percent of the Nation's senior citizens spending over \$1,000 a year out of pocket for their prescription medicine. They can't afford these prescriptions. The doctors tell them to take three prescriptions. They start off taking two, and then they take one, and eventually they can't afford their medicine, and they get sicker and they need perhaps institutional care, which is far more expensive. What is so sad is that the seniors, of course, with Medicare not covering prescriptions, have to pay out of pocket. On top of that, they have to subsidize the big buyers, the health maintenance organizations, the health plans, and other big buyers that are in a position to get a discount on their prescription medicine.

So Senator SNOWE and I, in support of the bipartisan Snowe-Wyden bill, are urging seniors to send copies of their prescription drug bills to the Senate, to your Senators, in Washington, DC, in the hopes that we can deal with this in this session of the Senate.

I have been concerned about this issue since back in the days when I was codirector of the Oregon Gray Panthers. I ran the legal aid office for senior citizens then, and prescriptions were awfully important even then. But the fact is they are much more important to the Nation's older people today than they were then because, today, so many of these prescriptions can, in effect, help to keep seniors well and healthy and physically fit. So many of the drugs today can help to lower blood pressure, or deal with cholesterol problems, or a wide variety of conditions, and can keep our seniors healthy. The savings associated with these kinds of drugs are absolutely staggering.

I reported last week, when we talked about the question of prescriptions for